

O 041317Z DEC 86
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9884
INFO AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
AMEMBASSY CAIRO
AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NICOSIA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY RIYADH
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
UNVIE MISSION VIENNA 0003
USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 06632

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: MOPS PREL LE
SUBJECT: THE CAMPS WAR IN LEBANON

¶1. (SECRET/NOFORN - ENTIRE TEXT)

¶2. SUMMARY: THE WAR OF THE CAMPS IN LEBANON CONTINUES UNABATED WITH FIERCE FIGHTING. NOT SURPRISINGLY, LEBANESE POLITICIANS HAVE DIFFERING VIEWS ON THE WAR, DEPENDING ON THEIR POLITICAL OPTIC. THERE FOLLOWS OBSERVATIONS BY SEVERAL LEBANESE POLITICIANS IN CONVERSATIONS WITH AMBASSADOR DECEMBER 3 AND 4. END SUMMARY.

¶3. THE CAMPS WAR BETWEEN THE PALESTINIANS AND THE SHIA AMAL FORCES CONTINUES TO RAGE. NOW IN ITS SIXTH WEEK, A MAJOR STRATEGIC CONFRONTATION CONTINUES AROUND SIDON. THE RASHADIYAH CAMP NEAR TYRE REMAINS ENCIRCLED. SHATILA AND BURJ AL-BURAJINAH IN BEIRUT'S SOUTHERN SUBURBS CONTINUE UNDER RELENTLESS BOMBARDMENT. AS REPORTED BY DAO/BEIRUT, ELEMENTS OF THE MUSLIM 6TH AND 1ST BRIGADES OF THE LEBANESE ARMY HAVE JOINED WITH AMAL IN THE SIEGES OF SHATILA AND BURJ AL-BURAJINAH. THE SYRIANS ARE PROVIDING AMMO AND LOGISTIC SUPPORT TO AMAL. THERE ARE UNCONFIRMED REPORTS OF UP TO 300 SYRIAN TROOPS IN AMAL UNIFORMS JOINING THE FIGHTING.

¶4. NATIONAL LIBERALS PARTY PRESIDENT DANY CHAMOUN (MARONITE CHRISTIAN) TOLD AMBASSADOR THAT HE IS DELIGHTED WITH THE WAR OF THE CAMPS. CHAMOUN SAID THAT AS LONG AS THE SHIA AND THE PALESTINIANS ARE KILLING ONE ANOTHER AND LEAVING THE CHRISTIANS ALONE, THE SITUATION IS JUST FINE.

¶5. FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER FUAD BUTROS (ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN) SEES THE CAMPS WAR AS ENHANCING THE POSSIBILITY OF A RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN LEBANESE PRESIDENT GEMAYEL AND SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASSD. BUTROS SAID THAT SYRIAN FAILURE TO HAVE THEIR SURROGATE AMAL FIGHTERS ACHIEVE VICTORY OVER THE PALESTINIANS HAS FURTHER UNDERMINED ASSAD'S POSITION, WHICH HAD ALREADY BEEN WEAKENED BY WESTERN PRESSURE FOLLOWING THE REVELATIONS OF SYRIAN-SPONSORED TERRORIST ACTS. BUTROS BELIEVES THAT BECAUSE ASSAD IS WEAKENED, HE WILL BE MORE LIKELY TO BE ACCOMMODATING TO GEMAYEL.

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¶6. SHIA MODERATE DEPUTY RAFIQ SHAHIN (WHOSE CONSTITUENCY OF NABATIYAH INCLUDES THE MAGHDUSHAH AREA WHICH COMMANDS THE HEIGHTS OVERLOOKING SIDON) VIEWS THE WAR AS A SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO THE SHIA POSITION. SHAHIN TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT THE SHIA CANNOT AFFORD TO ALLOW THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A PALESTINIAN ENCLAVE CENTERED AROUND SIDON AND INCLUDING THE HEIGHTS OF MAGHDUSHAH. IF THE PALESTINIANS SUCCEED IN ESTABLISHING AND HOLDING SUCH AN ENCLAVE, SOUTHERN LEBANON AND THE SHIA WILL BE CUT IN HALF. THE PALESTINIANS WILL CONTROL ACCESS BETWEEN BEIRUT AND THE SOUTH AND WILL BE IN A POSITION TO CHOKE IT OFF AT ANY TIME. FURTHERMORE, PALESTINIAN RETENTION OF MAGHDUSHAH WILL PUT THE PALESTINIANS WITHIN A KILOMETER OR TWO OF LAHAD'S ISRAELI-SPONSORED "ARMY OF SOUTH LEBANON." SHAHIN SAID LAHAD'S MILITIA OCCUPIES THE

TERRAIN BETWEEN JEZZINE AND SIDON, OVERLOOKING MAGHDUSHAH. SHAHIN ASSERTED THAT A PALISTIANH CLAVE AROUND SIDO, WOULD MEAN UNREMITTING PALESTINIAN OPERATIONS AGAINST LAHAD AND ISRAEL.

¶7. SHAHIN DESCRIBED AMAL LEADE NABIH BERRI'S POSITION AS UNDER GREAT PRESSURE FROM ALL SIDES. IF BERRI AND AMAL CANNOT REMOVE THE PALESTINIANS AROUND SIDON AND FORCE THEM BACK INTO THE CAMPS, BERRI AND AMAL AS A COHESIVE MOVEMENT WILL BE FINISHED. THE DIVIDED SHIA COMMUNITY WOULD THEN BE PREY TO EVEN MORE EXPLOITATION BY THE IRANIAN-SPONSORED HIZBALLAH EXTREMISTS.

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¶8. SHAHIN SAID THAT BECAUSE OF OQE CURRENT SITUATION, HIZBALLAH FIGHTERS ARE FIGHTING AND DYING WITH AMAL. SHAHIN'S SON IN NABITIYAH DESCRIBED TO SHAHIN DECEMBER 3 THE FUNERAL OF 15 SHIA FROM ONE VILLAGE: 12 AMAL FIGHTERS AND 3 HIZBALLAH. SHAHIN SAID HIZBALLAH IS ALSO COOPERATING WITH AMAL AROUND TYRE AND IN BEIRUT. THE HIZBALLAH LEADERSHIP DOES NOT LIKE SUPPORTING BERRI BUT BECAUSE OF THE EXTENSIVE BLOODSHED, THE SHIA ARE UNITED AGAINST THE PALESTINIANS.

¶9. SHAHIN ALSO DESCRIBED BLOODY ATROCITIES COMMITTED BY BOTH SIDES AGAINST NON-COMBATTANTS, WOUNDED, AND PRISONERS.

¶10. SHAHIN ALSO THOUGHT THAT THE FAILURE THUS FAR OF THE SYRIAN-SUPPORTED AMAL EFFORT ENHANCES GEMAYEL'S LEVERAGE WITH ASSAD.

¶11. COMMENT: IT IS CLEAR THAT THIS THIRD VERSION OF THE CAMPS WAR DIFFERS FROM THE PREVIOUS TWO. IF THE PALESTINIANS SUCCEED IN SECURING AN ENCLAVE IN AND AROUND SIDON, THEY WILL HAVE SUCCEEDED IN CHANGING THE MILITARY AND POLITICAL MAP OF LEBANON FROM BEIRUT TO THE ISRAELI BORDER.

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